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New York

President	Mr. Akram	(Pakistan)
Members	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Bulgaria	Mr. Tafrov
	Cameroon	Mr. Tidjani
	Chile	Mr. Maquieira
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
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	Mexico	Mr. Aguilar Zinser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Gatilov
	Spain	Mr. Arias
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Wehbe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Negroponte

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

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03-36269 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Roed-Larsen to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I now give the floor to Mr. Roed-Larsen.

Mr. Roed-Larsen: It was with sadness that, on my arrival in New York, I learned of three suicide bombings against Israeli citizens in 24 hours. My heart goes out to the families of the victims of those senseless acts, which are unjustified on any moral or political grounds. It is my sincere hope that the parties will not be diverted from the quest for peace by this terrorism.

Since the last briefing on the situation in the Middle East, on 16 April, we have seen the tentative budding of a new and fragile Middle East peace process. The events that led to this new beginning were the confirmation by the Palestinian Legislative Council of Abu Mazen as the first Palestinian Prime Minister and the subsequent presentation to the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority of the Quartet's road map for Middle East peace.

These are necessary and positive beginnings, but — I will recall — they are only beginnings. Peacemaking is a long, difficult and painful process, not a single, spectacular event. We must temper optimism and hopefulness with the realistic understanding that the road map — and indeed the road to the road map — will be strewn with obstacles, as we have seen lately.

Success will depend upon the good faith and performance of the parties and on the determination of the Quartet, key regional actors such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia and the broader international community. They will have to stay the course. Especially in these early days, we must continue to work hard for the implementation of the road map and to assist the parties to follow its path. We must always keep in view the plan's goals: a viable, sovereign and democratic Palestine; a secure and prosperous Israel; and a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

The obstacles to those goals are numerous. Since the last briefing to the Security Council, 95 people have lost their lives to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — 79 Palestinians and 16 Israelis. That raises the total death toll since September 2000 to 2,648 Palestinians and 751 Israelis.

On 29 April, the same day that Abu Mazen was confirmed as Prime Minister and his cabinet was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council, a suicide bomber struck a pub in Tel Aviv, killing three and injuring dozens. On 24 April, a suicide bomber again tragically exploded a bomb in the Israeli town of Kfar Sava, killing one and injuring 13.

The Secretary-General has consistently condemned such cowardly and heinous terrorist acts. He has also recently called on the Israelis and Palestinians not to allow extremists who carry out such repugnant attacks to hijack the peace process and dictate agendas. Above all, terrorists should not have the power to hold hostage a process that has the potential of ending the terror, providing security for Israel and alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. The groups responsible for terrorist acts should immediately cease all forms of violence and remove that obstacle to peace.

The Palestinian Authority must bring to justice those involved in planning and carrying out those attacks. Under the first phase of the road map, the Palestinian Authority is obligated to "undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain

individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere".

We, of course, recognize that Abu Mazen and Minister of State for Internal Security Mohammed Dahlan need assistance, as called for in the road map, to "rebuild and refocus" the Palestinian security forces in order to effectively provide security for Palestinians and to prevent terror attacks on Israelis. Support from the Government of Israel is necessary to help Abu Mazen and Mr. Dahlan to carry out that task. Reciprocal confidence-building measures are essential in order to create legitimacy and popular support for Abu Mazen's anti-terror policies.

Here we find a natural dependency between Israelis and Palestinians. The terror will not stop unless both sides take reciprocal acts in parallel. But such progress will require, first and foremost, determination, focus and will on the part of the new Palestinian Government. Rapid progress on that front will be an important test of the capability of the Palestinian Authority to take the steps necessary to implement the road map.

Under the first phase of the road map, Israel is required to take "no actions undermining trust, including ... attacks on civilians" or "confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property as a punitive measure".

Only hours after the presentation of the road map to the Israeli and Palestinian Prime Ministers, on 1 May, Israeli military operations in Gaza City resulted in the deaths of at least 13 Palestinians and injury to many more. Yet the killings of Palestinian civilians and the destruction of their property continue. House demolitions continue at an average rate of 70 houses per month, a trend that seems to be increasing. The amount of destroyed agricultural land increased by almost 100 per cent in six months.

I wish to make it clear that we do not question Israel's right to self-defence in the face of repeated terrorist attacks. The United Nations must, however, repeat the call on the Israeli authorities to abandon the use of excessive force in densely populated areas and to protect the safety of civilians and preserve their property in keeping with Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.

It is important in this context to point out that illegal armed elements in Palestinian areas bear a heavy responsibility for violence that affects Palestinian civilians by basing themselves in civilian areas, contrary to international humanitarian law. I note that Prime Minister Abu Mazen has stated that his Government has the goal of disarming such groups.

We also restate our opposition to extrajudicial killings and call on the Government of Israel to desist immediately from such acts. We believe that the best way to ensure the security of Israelis is by resolving the conflict, precisely through the road map.

At each briefing we have informed the Council about the situation regarding humanitarian and socio-economic conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. As we have stated on many occasions, the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza has at its core the movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli security regime. Movement in and out of Palestinian population centres in the West Bank remains restricted due to more than 100 checkpoints and 300 to 400 ditches and earth mounds blocking roads. Those impediments prevent people from reaching medical facilities and from going to schools. Checkpoints and roadblocks are the single largest impediment to the Palestinian economy. My Office is about to release a periodic report on the effects of closure on the people of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and some preliminary findings are available.

In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, poverty rates increased from approximately 25 per cent, in 1998, to 60 per cent — rising to 75 per cent in Gaza by the end of 2002. In the past two years unemployment rates increased more than 20 per cent, to 53 per cent, according to conservative estimates. Since the current crisis started, in September 2000, closure has led to Palestinian losses of $5.4 billion, one year's worth of national income.

Closure continues to dominate the day-to-day reality of most people in the West Bank. Curfew, which restricts people to their homes, is the severest form of closure. During the last six months of 2002 there was an average of 130 days of military-imposed curfew in each of the major towns of the West Bank.

Movement restrictions handicapped Palestinian markets and production in 2002 by hindering both the local and the external marketing of goods. That has created a rapid deterioration in the productive sectors, in effect pushing the Palestinian economy out of production. It has been well documented that Israeli

closure policies have dramatically reduced the number of Palestinians working in Israel, which is currently at nearly one third of pre-crisis levels. But domestic employment has also been hit hard by the current Israeli policies.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the water and hygiene situation continues to worsen. There is strong evidence that water-related diseases have increased among rural communities, who have been forced to use contaminated water sources. Some 178 Palestinian communities have no water-distribution networks.

More than $1 billion in donor assistance annually, notably food aid and budgetary support, has been critical in stopping the complete economic collapse of Gaza and the West Bank. In 2002 nearly 83 per cent of that total went to emergency and budgetary support, such as paying Palestinian Authority salaries. In the same period food aid distribution managed to stem hunger in areas where markets were severely handicapped and where income loss had impoverished large segments of the population. Such aid is merely slowing the ongoing economic decline and creating a system of dependency, and not providing support for essential sustainable development.

In the face of rising misery among Palestinians, it is essential that the closure regime be lifted in a way that meets Israel's security needs while easing the plight of Palestinians. I would like to say in that regard that we must recognize that Israel is facing a troubling dilemma. In effect — if I may say so — they are "damned if they do and damned if they don't". Only an ending of closure can revive the Palestinian economy and improve living conditions. Such measures, however, might lead to an increase in terrorist attacks. My deep belief is that the road map provides the best way to bridge those concerns. Its approach is to place security and humanitarian obligations on both sides while strengthening the Palestinian Authority's security apparatus on the basis of the new Palestinian Prime Minister's anti-terrorism programme.

This grim situation is exacerbated in the Gaza Strip by a draconian closure regime recently instituted by the Israeli authorities that has resulted in the closing of Gaza to all but those with diplomatic passports. This new situation has been characterized by confusion caused by a lack of effective and appropriate communication from the Israeli authorities and a policy regime that has changed on an almost daily basis. The events of the past few weeks bear fuller description.

Following the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv on 30 April new security measures were imposed at the Erez crossing from Israel into the Gaza Strip, necessitating security checks, including interrogation and body searches, for all internationals not holding diplomatic visas. The average crossing time was extended from the normal 20 minutes to between two and two and one half hours, and in some cases up to nine hours.

On 8 May, the donor grouping, the Task Force on Project Implementation (TFPI), was informed of a set of rules that would be imposed on a permanent basis. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories is the representative of the United Nations family on the Task Force, which has responsibility in the donor community for access issues. These rules include the following.

All international staff members who do not hold a diplomatic passport and visa will be subject to a car search and metal detector search on entering Gaza similar to, but more thorough than, the checks that are already in place for international staff members that are leaving Gaza. Secondly, all staff entering Gaza will be asked to sign a declaration that effectively attempts to abrogate Israel's responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations staff, facilities and equipment.

On 9 May, the TFPI was informed that the declaration introduced on 8 May would not be applicable to United Nations staff, but that the Erez crossing would be closed to all foreigners travelling on tourist or work visas issued to staff of non-governmental organizations. On 11 May, the TFPI was informed that, until further notice, the Erez crossing would be closed to all except those holding diplomatic passports and visas. Holders of valid United Nations laissez-passer and service visas for Israel are now barred from entering or leaving Gaza, leaving significant numbers of United Nations staff stuck on either side of the boundary and unable to carry out their work. As of today, some United Nations staff members have been allowed to enter and leave Gaza.

However, the core of the matter is that these policies are violations of the privileges and immunities of United Nations personnel. They run counter to Israel's international humanitarian law obligations as the occupying Power for the well-being of the people

of Gaza. The measures employed at the Erez crossing severely hamper the ability of the United Nations to provide needed assistance to the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, which is already under strain. Potentially, hundreds of international staff members will be hampered in the performance of their duties.

On 9 May, the TFPI wrote to the Israeli Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories requesting a formal notification of the new security measures imposed in the Gaza Strip and urgently requesting a meeting to address the access issue. In addition to the efforts of the Task Force, the Secretariat and the United Nations agencies on the ground are taking steps to express to Israeli authorities the United Nations strong concerns about this situation and to bring about a change in policy. Last Thursday, I met with senior officials of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the situation. As a result, the Ministry agreed to meet with me in my capacity as the Special Coordinator and the heads of United Nations funds, agencies and programmes to hear our concerns and recommendations. I hope that this meeting will lead to the creation of mechanisms that would avoid such fundamental obstruction of United Nations operations essential to upholding a minimum level of Palestinian living conditions.

I wish to state clearly and unequivocally that if these efforts do not result in a significant improvement in access to the Gaza Strip for United Nations staff, it will become progressively impossible to carry out United Nations operations in Gaza. I spoke again to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Hansen this morning about this issue. He asked me to convey to the Council that he is making every effort to keep the Agency's services functioning, but that he cannot do so if these Israeli measures continue. As members of the Council know, nearly two thirds of the population of the Gaza Strip are refugees who depend on UNRWA for health, education and social services. He has confirmed that, in the current situation, it has become already impossible to carry out many humanitarian operations in a satisfactory manner. I must point out that, as the Occupying Power, Israel has prime responsibility for the humanitarian well-being of the Palestinian population under occupation. At present, the United Nations provides a wide variety of essential services in the Gaza Strip. We would expect that, if Israel effectively prevents the United Nations from working, it would recognize and accept its obligation to provide the needed assistance to the Palestinian people of Gaza. In our next briefing to the Council in one month, I hope that we will be able to report that this issue has been resolved.

The humanitarian situation significantly complicates the task ahead for Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen. We welcome his Government's endorsement of the road map and willingness to begin its implementation. This is an important step. The road map, however, is a document that requires of the parties concrete action. I know from my recent discussions with Prime Minister Abu Mazen that he appreciates this feature of the road map.

In his most recent briefing to the Council, Mr. Türk referred to the impressive progress already achieved by the Palestinian Authority in a number of areas. Indeed, Abu Mazen's appointment is a landmark achievement. A number of these accomplishments are called for in the road map and, as a result, Abu Mazen can correctly claim to have made substantial progress in implementing important steps in the first phase of the plan. Such steps include the appointment of a prime minister with empowered executive authority; immediate action on a credible process to produce a draft constitution for Palestinian statehood; continued appointment of Palestinian ministers empowered to undertake fundamental reform; and the establishment of an independent Palestinian election commission. We welcome such progress and look forward to working with the Palestinian Authority to consolidate and deepen these reforms.

We also look forward to progress in the area of security reform as called for in the road map. This is an area in which the Palestinian Authority has tragically failed over the past two years. The fate of Abu Mazen's Government is critically dependent on a radical and credible change of policy. Until the Palestinian and Israeli peoples feel safe and secure, the ultimate hopes of the road map will seem illusory.

As stated in the last briefing, and it bears repeating, Abu Mazen will have two main tasks in the area of security. He will need to restore law and order in Palestinian areas and reverse the breakdown in internal security. Simultaneously, he must take immediate steps to curb terrorism and to bring to justice those involved in carrying out terrorist attacks. He must ensure that Palestinian areas are not launching

pads for attacks on Israelis. The Prime Minister made a good programmatic start along these lines in his speech to the Palestinian Legislative Council when he spoke of disarming armed groups to ensure that the Palestinian Authority is the only authority in Palestinian-controlled areas.

Abu Mazen's work will be greatly aided by the planned renewed attempt by the Government of Egypt to induce all Palestinian groups to agree to a ceasefire. Such a ceasefire would be an important step toward Abu Mazen's goal of having arms only in the hands of a "rebuilt and refocused Palestinian Authority security apparatus", to quote the road map. We commend the Government of Egypt for its determination to achieve this end and stand ready to provide the support of the United Nations to the effort. This effort underlines the importance of the active participation of the Governments of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia as partners with the Quartet and the parties in the effective implementation of the road map.

The Government of Israel has yet to endorse the road map and commit to its implementation. We hope that Prime Minister Sharon's meeting with Prime Minister Abu Mazen last Saturday has increased Israel's comfort with the peace process and will lead to Israel's support for the road map. We firmly believe that the road map is very much in Israel's interest. It is encouraging that, according to recent opinion polls, a strong majority of Israelis, including voters of Prime Minister Sharon's own Likud Party, support the road map as well.

I find it hopeful that Prime Minister Sharon repeatedly has endorsed the two-State solution and called for the implementation of United States President Bush's 24 June 2002 vision, which calls for the end of the occupation that began in 1967. President Bush has also stated that the road map is a part of this vision.

The parties' endorsement of the goals of the road map and their willingness to begin to take steps along its path are essential. The road map is designed to be a process that requires the parties to take steps in reciprocity and in parallel. While this principle of parallelism does not imply a requirement for acting in lockstep, it does provide for actions by each party within defined periods of time that would build the confidence of the other.

I turn now to the situation along the Blue Line. I visited the Blue Line late last week and was provided with a helicopter tour of the Line by Major General Tewari, Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). I am pleased to report that, despite the tense situation that exists along the Line, the parties have acted with restraint and maintained an overall calm in the area. Council members may recall that the last violent breach of the Blue Line took place in late January. Since then, it appears that all concerned have followed their stated intent to avoid escalatory situations. We hope that this reflects the commitment of all of the parties to respecting the Blue Line.

Notwithstanding this positive situation, I regret having to draw attention — again — to continuing breaches in the form of Israeli air violations of the Blue Line and the anti-aircraft fire by Hizbullah. Hizbullah's anti-aircraft fire has raised an additional concern during this reporting period. On 18 February, an anti-aircraft gun was placed in close proximity to UNIFIL position 8-32. Despite repeated requests to the Government of Lebanon, the gun remains in place. Furthermore, on 28 April, a shell fired from an anti-aircraft gun landed approximately 10 metres outside a UNIFIL position. Shrapnel from the shell hit and pierced the roof of a prefabricated cabin at that position. Although no injuries to UNIFIL personnel were reported, the incident illustrates the dangers from such anti-aircraft fire.

Both the air violations and the ensuing anti-aircraft fire threaten to disrupt the calm that has otherwise characterized the situation along the Blue Line. Once again, we call upon the Government of Israel and the Government of Lebanon to cease these violations and to respect fully the Blue Line. We also call upon the Government of Lebanon to ensure the safety of UNIFIL personnel, so that they will be able effectively to perform their required functions.

In a difficult regional environment, we can celebrate the third anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, in full compliance with United Nations resolutions. Despite serious and tragic violations such as cross-border raids in which Israelis have been killed and abducted, the border between Lebanon and Israel, and Lebanon and Israeli-occupied Syria, remains calmer than it has been in decades. This should remind us of the power of the Security Council and of Security Council resolutions, the legitimacy that the United

Nations can confer on a peace process, the effectiveness of negotiating under United Nations auspices, and the usefulness of international law.

The road map went through a nine-month gestation. At the end of last month, it had a fragile birth. It will require care from the parties and from the international community to help it grow. But we should not have any false illusions. The birth marked only a beginning, and now the hard work begins.

One should not underestimate the importance of this period in the history of the Middle East conflict. The road map might not be a flawless document, but I believe that it is the best chance to achieve peace that is now available. In addition, it may well be the last chance for the parties to achieve a two-State solution for a very long time.

Two factors contribute to this belief. First, continuing Palestinian terror contributes to the radicalization of the peoples of both communities. It is difficult to imagine that a continuing cycle of violence would make Israelis or Palestinians more willing to make peace in the near future. Secondly, Israel's ongoing expansion of settlements, construction of the separation wall and other public-works projects in the West Bank would, over time, make the creation of a viable Palestinian State, part of which would be on the West Bank, more and more difficult.

If this assessment is accurate, the international community should focus on getting the parties to begin to move along the road map as quickly as possible. Only through the cooperation of Israel and of the Palestinian Authority, with the active support of the Quartet, key regional actors and the rest of the international community, will the vision of peace be achieved.

I should note that no other Middle East peace plan has enjoyed such wide regional and international backing as does the road map. That backing should help sustain the parties even as rejectionists try to derail the process through violence and other means. We must all stay focused on the ultimate goals in the face of such attacks.

In the end, however, the parties themselves must follow the road map, cooperate with each other in its implementation and endure the challenges to its vision. They must learn to work together during the implementation of the road map if they are to live side by side, as foreseen, at the end of the path. That end — a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians and between Israel and its other neighbours, as envisaged in the road map and consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) — is deeply in the interest of all of the peoples of the Middle East.

The President: I would like to thank Mr. Roed-Larsen for his comprehensive briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of this item.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.